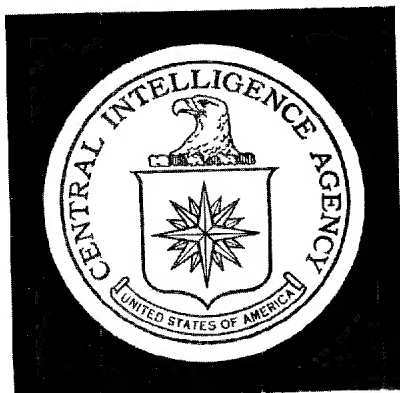


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

NSA review completed

Top Secret

21 December 1966

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

The military situation in South Vietnam on 20 and 21 December was highlighted by increased Communist aggressiveness against Allied forces operating in the northern coastal provinces of I Corps and in the central highlands of II Corps.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
An estimated Communist battalion on 20 December unsuccessfully attacked battalion-size US Marine elements conducting Operation CHINOOK near Hue, in Thua Thien Province (Paras. 1-2). North Vietnamese Army elements on 20 December launched a heavy mortar attack against an ARVN outpost near the DMZ (Para. 3). Enemy units operating in Pleiku Province ambushed a US/ARVN resupply convoy en route from Cheo Reo to Pleiku city and reportedly fired mortar rounds at the US/Vietnamese Special Forces camp at Plei Me (Paras. 4-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Constituent Assembly voted on the constitutional principles of local government on 20 December, and began discussing the legislative branch of the national government on 21 December (Paras. 1-3).

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. Communist Political Developments:

Peking has condemned the US letter to U Thant regarding a Vietnam cease-fire (Paras. 4-5).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Increased Communist aggressiveness against US and ARVN forces operating in the northern coastal provinces of I Corps and in the central highlands of II Corps highlighted military activity in South Vietnam on 20 and 21 December.

2. An estimated Communist battalion attacked battalion-strength US Marine task force elements on 20 December during the opening phase of search-and-destroy Operation CHINOOK in Thua Thien Province, approximately 12 miles northwest of Hue. The enemy, attacking in darkness and under cover of thick fog, first shelled US defensive positions with 60 rounds of mortar fire and, then, probed the marines' defensive perimeter with automatic weapons and small-arms fire for more than three hours before disengaging. Preliminary casualty reports are 54 enemy killed and four captured compared with eight US wounded.

3. An ARVN outpost located some 16 miles northwest of Quang Tri city in South Vietnam's northernmost province of Quang Tri was shelled by an estimated 30 rounds of 81-mm. mortar fire from North Vietnamese Army positions within the southern portion of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Casualties among the garrison's defenders included three killed and 15 wounded. US artillery supported the ARVN position, but enemy losses are unknown.

4. In the central highlands of Pleiku Province, a Viet Cong/NVA force of undetermined size on 20 December ambushed a 30-truck US/ARVN resupply convoy en route from Cheo Reo to Pleiku city. Fifteen government troops were killed (1 US) and six wounded in a 15-minute assault. Communist losses are unknown. A battalion-size ARVN reaction force failed to reestablish contact with the attackers.

5. Additionally, in Pleiku Province, unconfirmed press reports indicate that the US/Vietnamese Special Forces camp at Plei Me, 27 miles south of Pleiku city, received an estimated 15-20 enemy mortar rounds early on 21 December. No casualties or damage were reported, however.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. On 20 December the Constituent Assembly approved as a basic constitutional principle the direct election of mayors and province chiefs. This principle contrasts sharply with the present appointive system which has primarily named military officers to these posts. Although this principle was passed by a surprisingly wide margin in view of the controversy it had aroused during the debate on 19 December, there probably will be several exceptions included in the detailed constitutional provisions which have yet to be drafted. Many of the delegates who voted in favor of the principle apparently recognize that it can not be implemented immediately on a country-wide basis, and initially, at least, province chiefs will probably be elected only in the relatively secure provinces. In addition, the assembly recommended that the central government have the power to remove such elected officials if they violate the constitution or laws, or "seriously oppose" national policy.

2. Other principles of local government approved by the assembly on 20 December included the election of village chiefs, and of councils with "wide powers" at the village, city, and province levels. In the interest of ensuring continuity at all local levels, the assembly also recommended that the government appoint civil servants and military officers to assist elected officials as deputies for administration and security.

3. On 21 December, the assembly turned its attention to the legislative branch of the national government, and, according to press reports, approved the principle of a bicameral legislature. Details on the method of choosing the two legislative chambers and the division of legislative powers between them reportedly will be worked out later.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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Peking Condemns Goldberg Letter to U Thant

4. Peking has condemned Ambassador Goldberg's letter of 19 December to U Thant asking for help in arranging a cease-fire in Vietnam as a new "peace talks swindle." A NCNA broadcast of 20 December charged that the Goldberg letter was an attempt to "force peace talks through bombing" and a replay of the "stinking" 14-point negotiations plan that the US had proposed a year ago.

5. Peking's opposition to a negotiated settlement in Vietnam is as rigid today as it was a year ago. On 20 December, the People's Daily editorial repeated Peking's familiar position that it is necessary for the Vietnamese to keep fighting until all US forces are driven out of Vietnam.

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